

Understanding NICE guidance

Information for people who use NHS services

Laparoscopic surgery for colorectal cancer (review)

NICE 'technology appraisal guidance' advises on when and how drugs and other treatments should be used in the NHS.

This leaflet is about using laparoscopic surgery ('keyhole surgery') to treat people with colorectal cancer in the NHS in England and Wales. It explains guidance (advice) from NICE (the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence). It is written for people with colorectal cancer but it may also be useful for their families or carers or anyone with an interest in the condition.

It does not describe laparoscopic surgery or the treatments in detail – your specialist should discuss these with you. Some sources of further information and support are on the back page.

What has NICE said about laparoscopic surgery?

Laparoscopic surgery (including laparoscopically assisted surgery) is recommended as an alternative to open surgery for people with colorectal cancer if:

- both laparoscopic and open surgery are suitable for the person and their condition
- their surgeon has been trained in laparoscopic surgery for colorectal cancer and performs the operation often enough to keep his or her skills up to date.

The decision about whether to use open or laparoscopic surgery should be made after informed discussion between the patient and the surgeon. In particular, they should talk about whether the patient's condition is suitable for laparoscopic surgery, the risks and benefits of the two procedures, and the surgeon's experience.

Colorectal cancer

Colorectal cancer is cancer affecting parts of the bowel called the colon or rectum. It is the third most common cancer in the UK, with nearly 30,000 new cases in England and Wales in 2002. In 70% to 80% of patients, surgery to completely remove the tumour may be able to cure the condition. At present, 'open' surgery, which involves cutting a relatively large opening in the abdomen, is usually used to remove the part of the bowel with the tumour.

Laparoscopic surgery

Laparoscopic surgery involves carrying out an operation through small cuts in the abdomen. This type of procedure is often called keyhole surgery. The surgeon inserts a narrow telescope attached to a camera and other special instruments through the cuts to remove the part of the bowel with the tumour. Most of the operation is performed through these small cuts, but a slightly larger opening is needed to remove the section of bowel from the body.

Laparoscopically assisted surgery is similar, but involves using the larger opening to carry out part of the surgery as well as to remove the section of bowel.

Both procedures need smaller cuts than open surgery.

Laparoscopic surgery is not the only possible treatment for colorectal cancer.

Your healthcare team should talk to you about whether it is suitable for you and about other treatment options available.

What does this mean for me?

When NICE recommends a treatment, the NHS must ensure it is available to those people it could help, normally within 3 months of the guidance being issued. However, at the moment there is a shortage of surgeons skilled in carrying out laparoscopic surgery for colorectal cancer, so it will not be possible to make the procedure available throughout the NHS within this period.

If you have colorectal cancer, and your doctor thinks that laparoscopic surgery may be the right treatment for you, you should discuss its availability and, if appropriate, the other options with him or her. Please see www.nice.org.uk/aboutguidance if you appear to be eligible for the treatment but it is not available.

More information about colorectal cancer

The organisations below can provide more information and support for people with colorectal cancer. Please note that NICE is not responsible for the quality or accuracy of any information or advice provided by these organisations.

- Beating Bowel Cancer, 020 8892 5256,
www.beatingbowelcancer.org
- Cancerbackup, 0808 800 1234,
www.cancerbackup.org.uk
- Lynn's Bowel Cancer Campaign, 020 8891 5937,
www.bowelcancer.tv

NHS Direct online (www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk) may also be a good starting point for finding out more. Your local Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) may also be able to give you further advice and support.

About NICE

NICE produces advice (guidance) for the NHS about preventing, diagnosing and treating different medical conditions. The guidance is written by independent experts including healthcare professionals and people representing patients and carers. They consider all the research on the disease or treatment, talk to people affected by it, and consider the costs involved. Staff working in the NHS are expected to follow this guidance.

To find out more about NICE, its work and how it reaches decisions, see www.nice.org.uk/aboutguidance

This leaflet and other versions of the guidance aimed at healthcare professionals are available at www.nice.org.uk/TA105

You can order printed copies of this leaflet from the NHS Response Line (phone 0870 1555 455 and quote reference N1098).